

Message Text

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R 161914Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3204
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: FR, XA, XF
SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENT ON FRANCE'S RELATIONS WITH
THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

SUMMARY: ON DECEMBER 14 A CONFIDENT, ARTICULATE AND
SOMETIMES TOUGH PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING FIELDDED
QUESTIONS FROM A PANEL OF JOURNALISTS ON FRENCH POLICY
TOWARDS EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA. HOWEVER,
ALMOST ALL OF THE FREQUENTLY AGGRESSIVE QUESTIONS WERE
ADDRESSED TO THE LATTER TWO SUBJECTS. ON THE MIDDLE
EAST, GISCARD DEFENDED FRANCE'S CAUTIOUS ATTITUDE
TOWARDS SADAT'S INITIATIVES, REITERATED FRANCE'S
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SUPPORT FOR AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT
ORIENTED TOWARDS TRUE PEACE RATHER THAN THE NARROWER
QUESTION OF SECURITY, AND DECLARED THAT FRANCE ALONG
WITH THE OTHER STATES OF WESTERN EUROPE HAS A ROLE TO
PLAY GUARANTEEING A MIDDLE EAST PEACE. QUESTIONS ON
AFRICA WERE HEAVILY ORIENTED TOWARDS THE SITUATION IN
NORTH AFRICA AND PARTICULARLY RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA

AND THE QUESTION OF FRENCH HOSTAGES OF THE POLISARIO WHOSE IMMINENT RELEASE HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED EARLIER IN THE DAY. (DETAILS ON RELEASE OF POLISARIO HOSTAGES BY SEPTTEL.)

ON THE SUBJECT OF RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA, GISCARD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THEY WERE NOT VERY GOOD AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL BUT POINTED OUT THAT THE BATTLE OF POLEMICS WAS A ONE-SIDED ONE; HE HAD NEVER ATTACKED BOUMEDIENE. GISCARD ALSO WENT TO SOME LENGTHS TO EXPLAIN THAT FRENCH RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA ON OTHER LEVELS CONTINUED QUITE NORMALLY; SEVERAL INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS WERE UNDER NEGOTIATION AND THERE ARE MORE FRENCH INSTRUCTORS IN ALGERIA THAN IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY. GISCARD PUT FRENCH MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO MAURITANIA IN THE CONTEXT OF ASSISTING A FRIENDLY STATE TO RESIST ATTACK FROM OUTSIDE ITS BORDERS AND IN PROTECTING FRENCH CITIZENS. HE DECLARED THAT FRANCE HAD VOTED IN THE UN FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE FORMER SPANISH SAHARA AND THAT IT WAS A PROBLEM FOR THE UN AND THE OAU "IN WHICH FRANCE HAS NO RESPONSIBILITY AND NO INTEREST OF ANY SORT". END SUMMARY.

1. THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 14 PRESIDENT GISCARD WAS INTERVIEWED BY A PANEL OF FIVE JOURNALISTS FROM PUBLICATIONS REPRESENTING VARIOUS VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SPECTRUM (BUT NOT THE COMMUNISTS). THE INTERVIEW WAS BILLED AS COVERING FRENCH POLICIES IN EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA. THE FIRST AREA GOT ALMOST NO ATTENTION APART FROM A BRIEF EXCHANGE ON GISCARD'S INITIATIVE AT THE EC COUNCIL TO CREATE A EUROPEAN JURIDICAL TERRITORY AND GLANCING COMMENT ON THE BRITISH VOTE IN EFFECT POSTPONING EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TO 1979. ON THE FIRST MAJOR THEME, THE MIDDLE EAST, GISCARD BEGAN BY SAYING THAT FRENCH POLICY TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST IS DOMINATED BY IDEA THAT IT IS IN THE INTEREST OF ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST TO HAVE PEACE AND THAT THE ACCENT SHOULD BE ON GETTING A PEACE SETTLEMENT RATHER THAN CONCENTRATING FIRST, AS SOME WOULD WISH, ON QUESTIONS OF SECURITY. HE DENIED THAT FRENCH ME POLICY IS DICTATED BY PETROLEUM CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT FRANCE BY ITSELF COULD NOT IN ANY EVENT INSULATE ITSELF FROM ANOTHER OIL EMBARGO AND WOULD BE HIT, AS IT WAS IN 1973, THE SAME AS ANY COUNTRY. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE SENSIBILITIES OF THE ISRAELIS, A PEOPLE WHO HAD SUFFERED A HISTORIC MARTYRDOM.

2. GISCARD RESPONDED TO A QUESTION ON A POSSIBLE BEGIN VISIT BY CONFIRMING THAT HE HAS AN OPEN INVITATION AND THAT HE HAD CHARGED CHABAN DELMAS DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO ISRAEL WITH INFORMING BEGIN OF THIS.

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HE SAID THAT HE HOPES FOR AN EARLY VISIT BUT THAT CONDITIONS SHOULD BE SUCH THAT THE VISIT WOULD BE "USEFUL".

3. GISCARD GAVE SUPPORT TO SADAT'S INITIATIVES AS HELPFUL IN LEADING TO AN OVERALL PEACE SETTLEMENT. SOONER OR LATER ALL THE PARTIES DIRECTLY CONCERNED OUGHT TO PARTICIPATE. IF A GENEVA CONFERENCE WERE HELD RIGHT AWAY WITHOUT SUFFICIENT PREPARATIONS IT

WOULD HAVE RISKED FAILURE. IT IS PREFERABLE THAT
CONVERSATIONS CONTINUE LEADING TO AN EVENTUAL GENEVA
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CONFERENCE WHICH WOULD RESOLVE THE PROBLEM. FRANCE,
HE SAID, DOES NOT WISH TO INTERVENE IN THIS PROCEDURE
BECAUSE FRANCE IS NOT A PARTICIPANT. AT THE APPRO-
PRIATE TIME, HOWEVER, WHEN IT COMES TIME TO TALK OF
GUARANTEES, FRANCE AND EUROPE WILL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.
GISCARD ALSO COMMENTED THAT ONE OUGHT NOT TO IGNORE
THE INFLUENCE AND ROLE OF THE SOVIET UNION. MOREOVER,
GUARANTEES WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE IF THEY DO NOT INCLUDE
ALL OF THE COUNTRIES CAPABLE OF ALTERING THE EQUILIB-
RIUM OF THE MIDDLE EAST -- AMONG WHICH POWERS OBVIOUSLY
IS THE SOVIET UNION.

4. GISCARD WAS SHARPLY AND CRITICALLY QUESTIONED BY
THE DIRECTING EDITOR OF THE PRO-SOCIALIST PARTY "NOUVEL
OBSERVATEUR" FOR HAVING ALLOWED RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA
TO DETERIORATE SHARPLY OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS TO THE
EXTENT THAT THE US AND WEST GERMANY HAVE SUPPLANTED
FRANCE AS ALGERIA'S PRINCIPLE TRADING PARTNERS.
GISCARD SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVELY POINTED OUT THAT SINCE
HIS VISIT TO ALGERIA IN 1975 HE HAD SCRUPULOUSLY
TREATED ALGERIA IN CONFORMITY WITH THE RULES OF INTER-
NATIONAL RELATIONS. HE HAD REFRAINED FROM ANY POLEMICS
AND HAD ENCOURAGED FRENCH FIRMS TO DO BUSINESS WITH THE
ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT. HE NOTED THAT ALGERIAN COMPLAINTS
THAT THE GOF WAS REFUSING TO SEND TEACHERS TO ALGERIA
WERE UNJUSTIFIED SINCE THERE ARE MORE FRENCH INSTRU-
CTORS IN ALGERIA THAN ANYWHERE ELSE AND IT IS NOT
POSSIBLE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER IN A TIME OF BUDGETARY
STRINGENCY.

5. PERHAPS THE LIVELIEST INTEREST WAS SHOWN TO THE
ISSUES OF THE POLISARIO AND THE FRENCH HOSTAGES --
EXPLAINABLE BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN ALGIERS EARLIER IN
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THE DAY THAT THE HOSTAGES WOULD BE RELEASED BEFORE
CHRISTMAS (SEPTEL). GISCARD USED THE OCCASION TO DO
SOME EDUCATING OF THE FRENCH PUBLIC ON THIS COMPLEX
QUESTION. HE INSISTED THAT FRANCE HAD NOTHING AGAINST
THE SAHARA PEOPLE AND HAD IN FACT SUPPORTED UN RESOLU-
TIONS CALLING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PEOPLE
OF THE SPANISH SAHARA. THIS IS AN AFRICAN ISSUE, HE

SAID. HE DENIED THAT THE FRENCH POSITION WAS INFLUENCED BY A DESIRE TO PROFIT FROM THE PHOSPHATES OF THE REGION -- SOMETHING IN WHICH FRANCE HAS NO INTEREST. "IN ANY CASE, (THE WESTERN SAHARA) IS A PROBLEM IN WHICH FRANCE HAS NO RESPONSIBILITY AND NO INTEREST OF ANY SORT." HE THEN WENT ON TO CONTRAST THIS WITH FRENCH INTEREST IN MAURITANIA, "A POOR RESPECTABLE COUNTRY WHICH DEFENDS ITS RIGHT TO EXIST AND ITS INDEPENDENCE WITHIN ITS FRONTIERS."

6. ON THE SUBJECT OF THE FRENCH IN MAURITANIA, GISCARD SAID THAT HE HOPED THEY WOULD BE PROTECTED AND THAT

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FRANCE HAS CERTAIN OBLIGATIONS IN THIS REGARD.
"I CONSIDER THE FRENCH PRESIDENT CHARGED WITH THE

SECURITY OF THE FRENCH. AND WHEN THEY ARE IN A SOVEREIGN AND INDEPENDENT STATE WHICH ASKS US TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SECURITY OF THE FRENCH THERE, WE DO IT."

7. VISIT TO GUINEA. ALMOST AS AN ASIDE, IN EXPLICATION OF FRANCE'S DESIRE FOR GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL AFRICAN STATES, HE MENTIONED THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY DIRECTED THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH LED TO THE REESTABLISHED OFFICIAL USE

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LISHMENT OF RELATIONS WITH GUINEA AND THAT HE PLANNED TO VISIT GUINEA "AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR". (THIS WILL COME AS A SURPRISE TO AFRICAN EXPERTS AT THE QUAI WHO HAVE BEEN ASSUMING THAT FOR BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLITICAL REASONS THE VISIT TO THE CONTROVERSIAL SEKOU TOURE WOULD BE PUT OFF UNTIL WELL AFTER THE MARCH ELECTIONS.)

8. COMMENT: GISCARD HANDLED HIMSELF WELL. HE REMAINED COOL IN THE FACE OF SOME AGGRESSIVE QUESTIONING, PARTICULARLY BY THE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR'S DANIEL, AND SEEMED TO HAVE HIS FACTS WELL IN HAND. HE MADE A FEW MINOR SLIPS THAT HAD HIS ELYSEE ADVISORS HOLDING THEIR BREATHS FOR FEAR THEY WOULD BE PICKED UP AND EMBELLISHED IN THE PRESS: IN THE EVENT, THEY WERE NOT. ESSENTIALLY GISCARD'S REMARKS WERE RESTATEMENTS OF KNOWN FRENCH POLICIES. THE INTERVIEW WAS PERHAPS NOT AS INFORMATIVE AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BECAUSE PUBLIC INTEREST WAS FOCUSED ON ONE ISSUE (THE MIDDLE EAST) IN WHICH FRANCE DOES NOT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE AND ANOTHER (THE HOSTAGES) WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY TANGENTIAL TO FRENCH AFRICAN POLICY. GISCARD WILL GIVE ANOTHER INTERVIEW ON THE SUBJECTS OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS, DISARMAMENT, AND NUCLEAR PROBLEMS IN EARLY JANUARY, I.E. RIGHT AFTER THE VISIT OF PRESIDENT CARTER TO FRANCE.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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CONFIDENT, ARTICULATE A
TAGS: PGOV, FR, XA, XF, (GISCARD D'ESTAING, VALERY)
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Type: TE
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